



Odisha

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- » Nature Camp (Satkosia; p594)
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- » Lotus Eco Village (p600)
- » Hotel Gandhara (p596)

Best Temples

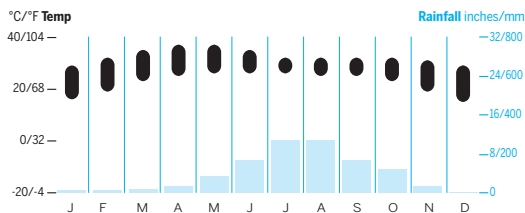
- » Sun Temple (p600)
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Why Go?

Long ignored by all but the most intrepid, Odisha (Orissa) is a backseat destination with unfamiliar flair. Travellers are waking up to its intricate patchwork of culture, tradition, sun and sand, but it continues to feel relatively undiscovered. Odisha affords an escape from the frenzy of other Indian traveller epicentres and boasts the World Heritage-listed Sun Temple in Konark, bursting with brilliantly worked scenes of Odisha life. Medieval temples pepper the streets of the capital, Bhubaneswar. Wonderful national parks and wildlife sanctuaries are crammed with tigers, elephants, Irrawaddy dolphins, monster crocodiles and millions of migratory birds. Chilika Lake, Asia's largest brackish lagoon, is flanked by inexpensive seaside retreats along one of India's prettiest coasts. Inland, the Adivasis (tribal people) live precariously on the edge of mainstream society, yet retain their colourful, fascinating traditions – a metaphor for Odisha itself.

When to Go

Bhubaneswar



Nov–Mar Warm and dry, just like a fresh load of laundry.

Nov Join the beach bash at Puri's Beach Festival.

Dec The Unesco-betrothed Sun Temple is the backdrop for the seductive Konark Festival.

Dishes of Odisha

If there is a staple in Odishan kitchens, it's mustard, used ubiquitously in seed, paste and oil forms, giving many Odisha dishes a distinct pungent flavour. A typical meal consists of *bhata* (rice) served alongside a variety of tasty side dishes like *kaharu phula bhaja* (fried pumpkin flower); *dalma* (dahl cooked with pumpkin, potato, plantains and eggplant, then fried in a five-spice oil of fenugreek, cumin, black cumin, anise and mustard, topped with grated coconut); and *besara* (vegetables or river fish with mustard-paste gravy). *Saga bhaja*, leafy greens lightly fried with garlic paste and a five-seed mixture called *pancha phutan* (cumin, mustard, anise, black cumin and chilli) is also a treat here. On the coast, fish and prawns are omnipresent: *sarison macha* is a superb favourite fish dish cooked in a mustard-based curry.

DON'T MISS

Odisha's masterstroke is undeniably its 13th-century **Sun Temple** at Konark; one of the state's most unforgettable journeys is a tour through the **Western tribal regions**, where colour and culture collide in the fascinating villages and markets of some 62 tribal (Adivasi) societies.

Top State Festivals

- » Adivasi Mela (Jan, Bhubaneswar, p591) Features art, dance and handicrafts of Odisha's tribal groups.
- » Rath Yatra (Jun/Jul, Puri, p594) Immense chariots containing Lord Jagannath, brother Balbhadra and sister Subhadra are hauled from Jagannath Temple to Gundicha Mandir.
- » Puri Beach Festival (Nov, Puri, p596) Song, dance, food and cultural activities on the beach.
- » Konark Festival (Dec, Konark, p600) Features traditional music and dance and a seductive temple ritual.

MAIN POINTS OF ENTRY

Most travellers usually arrive at Bhubaneswar's Biju Patnaik Airport or by the rails into Bhubaneswar (BBS) or Puri (PURI) junctions.

Fast Facts

- » Population: 41.9 million
- » Area: 155,707 sq km
- » Capital: Bhubaneswar
- » Main language: Odia
- » Sleeping prices: \$ below ₹900, \$\$ ₹900 to ₹3000, \$\$\$ above ₹3000

Top Tip

Puri is Odisha's travellers' hub. If you want to hit the ground running on a tribal tour, it's most pleasantly organised from there.

Resources

- » Visit Odisha (www.visitorissaa.org) – official Department of Tourism site.



Odisha Highlights

1 Catch the sun at dawn's light on the stunning **Sun Temple** (p600) in Konark

2 Sleep on the sands of the gorgeous Mahanadi River cutting through breathtaking **Satkosia Gorge Sanctuary** (p594)

3 Bliss-out beachside in traveller favourite **Puri** (p594),

but don't shy away from its holy quarter on the 'Indian' side

4 Barter in the colourful tribal marketplaces of **Onkadelli** (p605) and **Chatikona** (p604)

5 Ply wildlife-rich mangroves on the prowl for 8m-long saltwater crocodiles

in **Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary** (p608)

6 Enjoy the silence between the sea and Asia's largest brackish lagoon on an overnight camping trip to **Chilika Lake** (p601)

7 Explore the ancient Hindu shrines around India's Temple City, **Bhubaneswar** (p587)

History

Formerly known as Kalinga, then Orissa, Odisha (per a longstanding name-change campaign that finally received Lok Sabha approval in 2010) was once a formidable maritime empire that had trading routes leading down into Indonesia, but its history is somewhat hazy until the demise of the Kalinga dynasty in 260 BC at the hands of the great emperor Ashoka. Appalled at the carnage he had caused, Ashoka forswore violence and converted to Buddhism.

Around the 1st century BC Buddhism declined and Jainism was restored as the faith of the people. During this period the monastery caves of Udayagiri and Khandagiri (in Bhubaneswar) were excavated as important Jain centres.

By the 7th century AD Hinduism had supplanted Jainism. Under the Kesari and Ganga kings, trade and commerce increased and Odishan culture flourished – countless temples from that classical period still stand. The Odishans defied the Muslim rulers in Delhi until finally falling to the Mughals during the 16th century, when many of Bhubaneswar's temples were destroyed.

Until Independence, Odisha was ruled by Afghans, Marathas and the British.

Since the 1990s a Hindu fundamentalist group, Bajrang Dal, has undertaken a violent campaign against Christians in Odisha in response to missionary activity. The often illiterate and dispossessed tribal people have suffered the most from the resulting communal violence, which has been as much about power, politics and land as religious belief.

Violence flared up again in 2008 after the killing of a Hindu leader in Kandhamal district, and thousands of Christians were moved to government relief camps outside the district after their homes were torched.

The creation of the neighbouring states of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh has prompted calls for the formation of a separate, tribal-oriented state, Koshal, in the northwest of Odisha, with Sambalpur as the capital. A separatist political party, the Kosal Kranti Dal (KKD), fielded candidates in the 2009 state election.

The last few years have seen something of an industrial boom in Odisha, with an influx of big steel plants and controversial mining.

Climate

Monsoonal rains and cyclones in July to October can seriously affect transport. A particularly devastating cyclone struck Odisha

in 1999, causing significant damage and the loss of thousands of lives, and in 2008 serious flooding destroyed crops and villages and led to mass evacuations.

National Parks

The admission fee for foreigners to visit most of Odisha's national parks and wildlife sanctuaries is ₹1000 per day – including the day you depart – a hefty fee that Odisha's private tour operators have continued to protest against.

Dangers & Annoyances

Mosquitoes here have a record of being dengue and malaria carriers. See p1190 for advice, and consider bringing a mosquito net.

i Information

Odisha Tourism (www.OdishaTourism.gov.in) has a presence in most towns, with offices for information and tour/hotel booking. It also maintains a list of approved guides for tribal-area visits. **Odisha Tourism Development Corporation** (OTDC; www.panthanivas.com), the commercial arm of Odisha Tourism, runs tours and hotels throughout the state.

i Getting There & Away

Air routes connect Bhubaneswar with Bengaluru, Delhi, Hyderabad, Mumbai (Bombay), Kolkata (Calcutta) and Chennai. Major road and rail routes between Kolkata and Chennai pass through coastal Odisha and Bhubaneswar with spur connections to Puri. Road and rail connect Sambalpur with Kolkata, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.

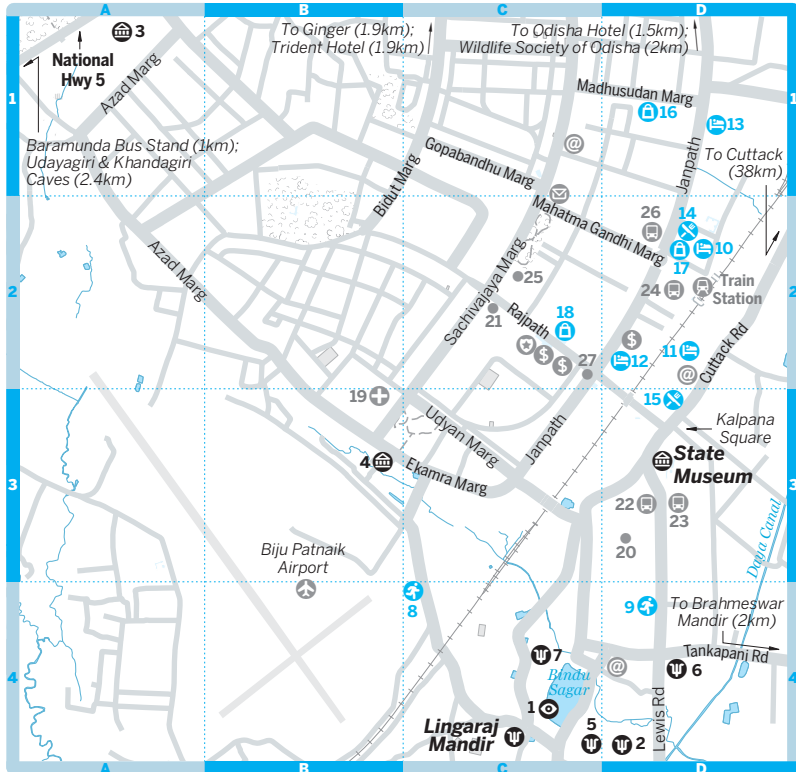
i Getting Around

Public transport in the coastal region is good with ample long-distance buses and trains. For touring around the interior hiring a car is the best option, although buses and trains are available if you're not in a hurry.

Bhubaneswar

☑0674 / POP 647,310

At first glance, Bhubaneswar's wide avenues, green belts and public highway murals that reflect its temple-town heritage – all on the outskirts – seem quite pleasant. Its inner sanctum, whose many gorgeous and well-preserved Hindu temples inspired the nickname of India's Temple City, is also a serene spiritual epicentre and a living museum of Odishan medieval temple architecture. The problem is the rest of it – typically noisy, polluted and congested. But a day or two to take in the old city's holy centre around Bindu Sagar where, from the thousands that once



stood here, 50-odd stone temples remain, is an enthralling pit stop.

Sights

According to legend, Bhubaneswar once boasted over 7000 temples and is a long-harnessed religious centre dating back 2000 years. Today, it's most famous for its surviving medieval temples, a mix of 'live' (still in use as places of worship) and 'dead' (archaeological sites). Bhubaneswar still lays claim to around 500 or so Hindu temples. Along with Puri and Konark, the city forms one side of East India's hallowed 'Swarna Tribhujā' (the 'Golden Triangle'), a heavy-visited domestic tourist route.

Unless you're on an organised tour, a priest might approach you and expect a donation; ₹20 is reasonable. Consider it a guiding fee as undoubtedly the priest will reveal something about his temple.

To see all the major temples, charter an autorickshaw for two to three hours (about

₹300). A live temple will always have a red flag fluttering above it.

Lingaraj Mandir

HINDU TEMPLE

The 54m-high Lingaraj Mandir, dedicated to Tribhuvaneshwar (Lord of Three Worlds), dates from 1090 to 1104 (although parts are over 1400 years old) and is surrounded by more than 50 smaller temples and shrines. The granite block, representing Tribhuvaneshwar, is bathed daily with water, milk and bhang (marijuana). The main gate, guarded by two moustachioed yellow lions, is a spectacle in itself as lines of pilgrims approach, *prasad* (temple-blessed food offering) in hand.

Because the temple is surrounded by a wall, and closed to non-Hindus, foreigners can see it only from a viewing platform (this can also include foreign Hindus, as some Indian Hindus do not believe in conversion). Face the main entrance, walk around to the

Bhubaneswar

☉ Top Sights

Lingaraj Mandir.....	C4
State Museum	D3

☉ Sights

1 Bindu Sagar	C4
Kedargauri Mandir.....	(see 2)
2 Mukteswar Mandir.....	D4
3 Museum of Tribal Arts & Artefacts.....	A1
4 Odisha Modern Art Gallery	B3
5 Parsurameswar Mandir	C4
6 Raja Rani Mandir.....	D4
Siddheswar Mandir	(see 2)
7 Vaital Mandir.....	C4

☉ Activities, Courses & Tours

8 Alternative Tours.....	C4
9 Discover Tours.....	D4
Odisha Tourism	(see 20)

🛏 Sleeping

Hotel Pushpak.....	(see 15)
10 Hotel Richi.....	D2
11 Hotel Upasana	D2
12 Kasturi Guest House	D2
13 New Marrison	D1

🍴 Eating

14 Hare Krishna Restaurant.....	D2
15 Khana Khazana	D3
Maurya Gardens.....	(see 10)
Tangerine 9.....	(see 14)

🛍 Shopping

16 Ekamra Haat.....	D1
17 Modern Book Depot.....	D2
18 Odisha State Handloom Cooperative (Utkalika)	C2

ℹ Information

19 Capital Hospital.....	B3
Odisha Tourism	(see 20)
20 Odisha Tourism Development Corporation (OTDC)	D3

🚗 Transport

21 Air India.....	C2
22 Bus Stop for Cuttack	D3
23 Bus Stop for Puri.....	D3
24 City Bus Stand.....	D2
25 Former Capital Bus Stand.....	C2
26 Hop-On, Hop-Off Bus Stop.....	D2
27 Rajmahal Taxi Stand.....	C2

right and find the viewing platform down a short laneway to the left. There have been reports of aggressive hassling for 'donations' (according to our guide) at the viewing platform. The money will not go to the temple; stand your ground and do not pay.

Mukteswar, Siddheswar & Kedargauri Mandirs

HINDU TEMPLES

Not far from Parsurameswar is the small but beautiful 10th-century **Mukteswar Mandir**, one of the most ornate temples in Bhubaneswar; you'll see representations of it on posters and brochures across Odisha. Intricate carvings show a mixture of Buddhist, Jain and Hindu styles – look for the Nagarani (Snake Queen), easily mistaken by Westerners for a mermaid, who you'll also see at the Raja Rani Mandir. The ceiling carvings and stone arch are particularly striking as is the arched *torana* (architrave) at the front, clearly showing Buddhist influence.

Siddheswar Mandir, in the same compound, is a later but plainer temple with a fine red-painted Ganesh. Over the road is **Kedargauri Mandir**, one of the oldest tem-

ples in Bhubaneswar, although it has been substantially rebuilt.

Vaital Mandir

HINDU TEMPLE

This 8th-century temple, with a double-storey 'wagon roof' influenced by Buddhist cave architecture, was a centre of Tantric worship, eroticism and bloody sacrifice. Look closely and you'll see some very early erotic carvings on the walls. Chamunda (a fearsome incarnation of Devi), representing old age and death, can be seen in the dingy interior, although her necklace of skulls and her bed of corpses are usually hidden beneath her temple robes.

Parsurameswar Mandir

HINDU TEMPLES

Just west of Lewis Rd lies a cluster of about 20 smaller but important temples. Best preserved is Parsurameswar Mandir, an ornate Shiva temple built around AD 650. It has lively bas-reliefs of elephant and horse processions, and Shiva images.

Raja Rani Mandir

HINDU TEMPLE

(Indian/foreigner ₹5/100, video ₹25; ☀dawn-dusk) This temple, built around 1100 and

surrounded by manicured gardens, is famous for its ornate *deul* (temple sanctuary) and tower. Around the compass points are pairs of statues representing eight *dikpalas* (guardians) who protect the temple. Between them, nymphs, embracing couples, elephants and lions peer from niches and decorate the pillars. The name of the temple isn't for a particular king and queen, but is the name of the stone used in the temple's construction.

Brahmeswar Mandir

HINDU TEMPLE

Standing in well-kept gardens, flanked on its plinth by four smaller structures, this 9th-century temple is a smaller version of Lingaraj Mandir. It's notable for its finely detailed sculptures with erotic elements.



Udayagiri & Khandagiri

Caves

HISTORICAL SITE

(admission both sites Indian/foreigner ₹5/100, video ₹25; ☀️dawn-dusk) Six kilometres west of the city centre are two hills riddled with rock-cut shelters. Many are ornately carved and thought to have been chiselled out for Jain ascetics in the 1st century BC.

Ascending the ramp at Udayagiri (Sunrise Hill), note **Swargapuri** (Cave 9) to the right with its devotional figures. **Hathi Gumppha** (Cave 14) at the top has a 117-line inscription relating the exploits of its builder, King Kharavela of Kalinga, who ruled from 168 to 153 BC.

Around to the left you'll see **Bagh Gumppha** (Tiger Cave; Cave 12), with its entrance carved as a tiger mouth. Nearby are **Pavana Gumppha** (Cave of Purification) and small **Sarpa Gumppha** (Serpent Cave), where the tiny door is surmounted by a three-headed cobra. On the summit are the remains of a defensive position. Around to the south-east is the single-storey elephant-guarded **Ganesh Gumppha** (Cave 10), almost directly above the two-storey **Rani ka Naur** (Queen's Palace Cave; Cave 1), carved with Jain symbols and battle scenes.

Continue back to the entrance via **Chota Hathi Gumppha** (Cave 3), with its carvings of elephants, and the double-storey **Jaya Vijaya Cave** (Cave 5), with a bodhi tree carved in the central area.

Across the road, Khandagiri offers fine views over Bhubaneswar from its summit. The steep path splits about one-third of the way up the hill. The right path goes to **Ananta Cave** (Cave 3), with its carved figures of athletes, women, elephants and geese

carrying flowers. Further along is a series of **Jain temples**; at the top is another (18th-century) Jain temple.

Buses don't go to the caves, but plenty pass nearby on NH5, or take an autorickshaw (about ₹200 return).

State Museum

MUSEUM

(www.Odishamuseum.nic.in; Lewis Rd; Indian/foreigner ₹5/50, camera ₹10/100; ☀️10am-5pm Tue-Sun) This museum boasts Odisha's best collection of rare palm-leaf manuscripts, traditional and folk musical instruments, Bronze Age tools, an armoury, and an impressive collection of Buddhist, Jaina and Brahmanical sculptures.

Bindu Sagar

LANDMARK

Bindu Sagar (Ocean Drop Tank) reputedly contains water from every holy stream, pool and tank in India.

FREE Museum of Tribal Arts &

Artefacts

MUSEUM

(☀️10am-5pm Tue-Sun) For anyone considering a visit to the tribal areas, this museum, off National Hwy 5 (NH5), is recommended. Dress, ornaments, weapons, household implements and musical instruments are displayed.

FREE Odisha Modern Art Gallery

ART GALLERY

(132 Forest Park; ☀️11am-8pm Tue-Sun) Housing a surprisingly high standard of contemporary art by local artists, this small gallery also has prints and originals for sale.

👉 Tours

Odisha Tourism runs a hop-on, hop-off **bus service** (per day ₹250) starting at the OTDC (p593). The AC buses do a loop of the city's temples every hour.

The OTDC runs a **city tour** (AC ₹250) every day except Monday, covering the Nandankanan Zoo, Dhauli, the Lingaraj and Mukteswar temples, the State Museum, and Udayagiri and Khandagiri Caves. Another tour goes to Pipli, Konark and Puri (AC ₹300, daily except Monday). Both tours leave from the Panthanivas Bhubaneswar hotel. These prices do not include entry fees.

Private tour operators organise customised tours into Odisha's tribal areas; these can also include visits to handicraft villages, and Similipal National Park and Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary. Prices will depend on number of people, transport and hotel standards, but expect to pay around US\$50 to

US\$100 per person per day for tours that include transport, accommodation and a professional guide, varying from budget to top end. Tribal tours usually start on a Sunday or Monday to synchronise with village markets.

Alternative Tours

TRIBAL/CULTURAL

(☎2590830; www.travelclubindia.com; Room 5, BDA Market Complex, Palaspalli) A veteran for tribal tours in Odisha, Nagaland and Arunchal Pradesh.

Discover Tours

TRIBAL/WILDLIFE

(☎2430477; www.Odihadiscover.com; 463 Lewis Rd; ☺closed Sun) Specialises in tribal and textile village tours as well as Bhitarkanika and Similipal.



Festivals & Events

Every January, Bhubaneswar goes tribal for the annual **Adivasi Mela** festival, celebrating the art, dance and handicrafts of Odisha's tribal groups.



Sleeping

Bhubaneswar has plenty of accommodation, but a real dearth of anything in the way of clean or appealing family-run places or traveller dens in the budget and lower mid-ranges. Conversely, it has a great selection of top-end hotels.



Ginger

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2303933; www.gingerhotels.com; Jayadev Vihar, Nayapalli; s/d ₹2999/3499; ☎☎☎) Ginger is paint-by-numbers boutique business hotel chain (owned by Tata) with an IKEA-like self-service philosophy that means you're not constantly surrounded by tip-demanding bag-carriers, laundry peons etc. With young friendly staff, clean modern lines, and fresh, spotless rooms with LCD TVs, tea and coffee, minifridge and silent AC, it's Bhubaneswar's best bang for the buck. Meals are served buffet style in the restaurant and there's a 24-hour branch of Café Coffee Day that will deliver to your room. Advanced internet booking can cut rates by 50%.

Mayfair Lagoon

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2360101; www.mayfairhotels.com; Jaydev Vihar; d cottages from ₹9000, d villas ₹30,000; ☎☎☎☎) Quirky, colourful, even kitschy, but luxuriously Indian at the same time. In the jungle-like grounds you'll find static tigers, an elephant, even a twin-prop 1942 aircraft. The cottages are scattered around a serene lagoon and facilities run to a complimentary breakfast, six excellent restaurants,

a British-style pub and Bhubaneswar's pub, nightclub and mini-bowling alley, 10 Downing Street.

New Marrion

BOUTIQUE HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2380850; www.hotelnewmarrion.com; 6 Janpath; s/d from ₹6100/6500; ☎☎☎☎) A centrally located hotel where rooms have contemporary, classy design – LCD TVs, dark-wood panelling and extraordinarily stylish shower curtains. Restaurants here includes South Indian, Italian-Mexican combo and Chinese, a great kebab house, a Café Coffee Day and a contemporary Scottish bar. Avoid executive rooms on the 2nd floor unless you like a rooftop as a patio.

Kasturi Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎2537050; Ashok Nagar, Janpath; r from ₹750, with AC from ₹1000; ☎) Located in the heart of Bhubaneswar's commercial district (read: noisy), this intimate guesthouse offers numerous categories for all budgets and is a little more welcoming than others in its price range. Rooms vary in size so there's something for everyone.

Hotel Pushpak

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2310185; Kalpana Sq; s/d incl breakfast ₹900/1000, with AC ₹1600/1800; ☎☎) Fresh coats of lavender paint that evoke the stylish Bhubaneswar traffic police uniforms in the AC rooms can't save them from seeming overpriced at this vaguely institutional, half-hearted choice, but the non-AC rooms are a different story. They haven't been renovated, but you'd be hard-pressed to find a better deal for the price.

Trident Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2301010; www.tridenthotels.com; CB-1, Nayapalli; s/d/ste from ₹10,000/11,000/13,000; ☎☎☎☎) The high-ceilinged lobby, inspired by Konark's temple architecture, is a beauty and the Trident is more refined, but the Mayfair is more fun, with loads more dining choices.

Hotel Richi

HOTEL \$

(☎2534619; 122A Station Sq; s/d incl breakfast from ₹400/600, d with AC from ₹1150; ☎) The stone facade of this dim hotel is Iron Curtain depressing; the rooms only marginally improve on that condition, but proximity to the train station make it (very) popular.

Hotel Bhagwat Niwas

HOTEL \$

(☎2313708; Kalpana Sq; s ₹200-250, d ₹350-450, d with AC ₹1100-1200; ☎) Behind Hotel Padma, the Bhagwat is what it is: a nearly

clean choice for rupee pinchers. Checkout is 24 hours.

Hotel Upasana

HOTEL \$

(☎2310044; upasana_bbsr@rediffmail.com; off Cuttack Rd; d from ₹900, with AC from ₹1100; ☹) Behind the rancid Bhubaneswar Hotel, the Upasana is one of the friendlier and more welcoming budgets in town.



Eating & Drinking



Tangerine 9

INDIAN/FUSION \$\$

(Station Sq; mains ₹60-250) The soothing namesake tones of this excellent restaurant won't relieve the burn of the fiery chicken Dum Puk, the first curry in a month to make our head tingle. All the dishes – North Indian (especially tandoori), Chinese and a few Thai thrown in – burst with the flavour of fresh herbs and spices. If you can't afford five-star-hotel dining but want the same quality for half the price, Tangerine 9 won't disappoint.

Maurya Gardens

INDIAN, CHINESE \$\$

(Hotel Richi, Station Sq; mains ₹50-160) This darkened restaurant is a welcome respite from the train-station chaos outside, as well as a dramatic contrast from the hotel in which it's located. The menu is loaded down with Chinese, Indian and Continental dishes and the curries are nice and hot, but if you want a beer to cool it down you'll have to eat (same menu) in the bar next door.

Hare Krishna Restaurant

INDIAN \$\$

(Station Sq, Lalchand Market Complex; mains ₹45-140; ☺lunch & dinner) The menu says 'Surrender to the pleasure of being vegetarian', and it's not difficult at this excellent veg restaurant. In dimly lit, upmarket surrounds you can enjoy mainly Indian dishes, including a wide range of tasty biryanis and pilaus.

Khana Khazana

INDIAN \$\$

(outside Hotel Padma, Kalpana Sq; snacks & mains ₹18-160; ☺dinner) It probably shouldn't be

your first meal in India, but this fast-food street stall with a few chairs and tables scattered outside does tandoori chicken, chicken biryani or large portions of delicious chow mein.



Entertainment



10 Downing Street

BAR, NIGHTCLUB

(Mayfair Lagoon, Jayadev Vihar; ☺7-11.30pm) So ridiculous it's awesome, 10 Downing Street is what happens when you build something from nothing. Bhubaneswar was hurting for nocturnal diversions, so it's all here: a colonial British-style megapub with pool, cricket on the TV and a small dance floor, too, with DJ's spinning house, R&B and Bollywood from 7pm. Oh. *Wait*. There's also a mini-bowling alley!



Shopping

Ekamra Haat

MARKET

(www.ekamrahaat.in; Madhusudan Marg; ☺10am-10pm) A wide-ranging exposition of Odishan handicrafts (and snack stalls) can be found at this permanent market in a large garden space. While the gates open at 10am, many stalls don't get going until later.

Odisha State Handloom

Cooperative

HANDICRAFTS

(Utkalika; Eastern Tower, Market Bldg) Odishan textiles, including appliqué and *ikat* (a technique involving tie-dyeing the thread before it's woven) works, can be bought here.



Information

Modern Book Depot (Station Sq; ☺9.30am-2pm & 4.30-9pm) Maps, English-language novels, coffee-table books, postcards and books on Odisha. If you're interested in learning some Odia, ask the owner about the well-regarded *Oriya in Small Bites*.

Oxford Bookstore (2nd fl, PAL Heights, Jaydev Vihar) Modern megachain bookstore and signature tea bar Cha Bar.

DON'T MISS

SIMPLY SUMPTUOUS

This dead simple **restaurant** (Market Bldg, Sahid Nagar; thalis ₹100-250; ☺lunch & dinner) is the place to try authentic Odishan cuisine, served in huge proportions thali-style on plantain leaves resting in traditional Bell Metal dishware. The restaurant observes Hindu dining restrictions (so no garlic or onions on Monday or Thursday) and the menu board is entirely in Odia, so just order veg or non-veg (not always available, depending on the religious calendar) and sit back and await your feast. It's like a Hindu Last Supper!

Capital Hospital (☎2401983; Sachivajaya Marg) Has a 24-hour pharmacy on-site.

CBG's (14 Kharvel Nagar; internet per hr ₹20; ☎8.30am-9pm Mon-Sat) Internet access.

Ganpati Travel & Communication (Kalpana Sq; internet per hr ₹30; ☎9am-9pm) Internet access.

Odisha Tourism (www.Odishatourism.gov.in) airport (☎9238578358); main office (☎2432177; Paryatan Bhavan, behind State Museum, Lewis Rd; ☎10am-6pm Mon-Sat); train station (☎2530715; ☎24hr) Tourist information, maps and lists of recommended guides.

Odisha Tourism Development Corporation (OTDC; ☎2430764; behind Panthanivas Bhubaneswar, Lewis Rd; ☎8am-8pm Mon-Sat) Commercial arm of Odisha Tourism. Books sightseeing tours and hotels.

Om Sai Communication (Ravi Talkies; internet per hr ₹12; ☎9am-11pm) Internet access conveniently located near temples.

Police (☎2533732; Capitol Police Station, Rajpath)

Post office (cnr Mahatma Gandhi & Sachivajaya Marg; ☎9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 3-7pm Sun)

State Bank of India (Rajpath; ☎10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Cashes travellers cheques and exchanges foreign currency.

Thomas Cook (130 Ashok Nagar, Janpath) Cashes travellers cheques, including Amex, and exchanges foreign currency.

i Getting There & Away

Air

Bhubaneswar's Biju Patnaik Airport is a 7km drive from town. **Air India** (☎2530533; www.airindia.com; Rajpath; ☎10am-4.45pm Mon-Sat) flies daily to Delhi, Chennai and Mumbai.

Jet Lite (☎2596176; www.jetlite.com; airport) flies direct to Kolkata daily. **IndiGo** (☎6543547; www.goindigo.in; airport) flies to Delhi, Bengaluru, Mumbai and Hyderabad daily. **Kingfisher** (☎2596046; www.flyingfisher.com; airport) flies to Mumbai, Bengaluru and Kolkata daily.

Bus

Baramunda bus station (☎Advance Ticket Booking Center 2354769; NH5) has frequent buses to Cuttack (₹14 to ₹15, one hour), Puri (₹35, 1½ hours) and Konark (₹40, two hours). Less frequent services go to Berhampur (₹120, five hours), Sambalpur (non-AC/AC ₹220/270, nine hours) and Baripada (non-AC/AC ₹170/200, seven hours). There are several daily services to Kolkata (non-AC/AC/sleeper ₹270/350/400, 12 hours).

Train

Foreigner's queue up at window 2 at the Computerised Reservation Office. The 12841 *Coromandal Express* travels daily to Chennai

(sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹391/1043/1424, 20 hours, 9.35pm). The 12801 *Purushottam Express* goes to Delhi (₹481/1296/1777, 31 hours, 11.30pm) and the 11020 *Konark Express* to Mumbai (₹484/1333/1838, 37 hours, 3.20pm).

Howrah is connected to Bhubaneswar by the 12074 *Jan Shatabdi* (2nd class/AC chair ₹142/460, seven hours, 6.20am daily except Sunday) and the daily 12822 *Howrah Dhuli Express* (₹122/432, seven hours, 1.20pm). To Sambalpur, the 12893 *Bhubaneswar-Sambalpur Express* (2nd class/AC chair ₹93/339, five hours, 6.45am) is quick, comfortable and convenient.

i Getting Around

No buses go to the airport; a taxi costs about ₹150 from the centre, though they are hard to come by. Try the Rajmahal taxi stand. An autorickshaw to the airport costs about ₹80 to ₹100. Prepaid taxis from the airport to central Bhubaneswar cost (non-AC/AC) ₹130/290, and to Puri or Konark ₹740/940. Another way to get to Puri or Konark in relative comfort is to go one way on an OTDC tour; let the guide know you won't be returning.

Around Bhubaneswar

NANDANKANAN ZOOLOGICAL PARK

Famous for its 11 blue-eyed white tigers, the **zoo** (www.nandankanan.org; Indian/foreigner ₹20/100, digital camera/video ₹10/100; ☎7.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 8am-5pm Oct-Mar), one of India's best, also boasts rare Asiatic lions, rhinoceroses, copious reptiles and long-snouted crocodiles, monkeys, deer, a vulture that is believed to have worked for the Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence agency and India's only orang-utan.

The highlight is the hour-long **lion and tiger safari** (₹30), which leaves every 30 minutes from 9am 5pm. Other attractions include a toy train and boat rides. A **cable car** (₹30; ☎zoo hr) crosses a lake, allowing passengers to get off halfway and walk down (300m) to the State Botanical Garden. Early or late in the day you might catch the elephants having a bath in the lake.

OTDC tours stop here for an (insufficient) hour or so. From Bhubaneswar, frequent public buses (₹15, one hour) leave from Kalpana Sq (near Hotel Padma) and outside the former Capital bus stand for Nandankanan village, about 400m from the entrance to the zoo. By taxi, a return trip (including waiting) costs about ₹350.

DHAULI

In about 260 BC one of Ashoka's famous edicts was carved onto a large rock at Dhau-li, 8km south of Bhubaneswar. The rock is now protected by a grill-fronted building and above, on top of a hillock, is a carved elephant.

On a nearby hill is the huge, white **Shanti Stupa** (Peace Pagoda), built by Japanese monks in 1972. Older Buddhist reliefs are set into the modern structure. You have to climb the stairs barefoot (hot! hot! hot!) but it's worth it for the four lovely images of the Buddha and great views of the surrounding countryside.

You'll find the turn-off to Dhau-li along the Bhubaneswar-Puri road, accessible by any Puri or Konark bus (₹8). From the turn-off, it's a flat 3km walk to the rock, and then a short, steep walk to the stupa. By autorickshaw/taxi, a return trip costs about ₹150/250.

HIRAPUR

Among iridescent-green paddies, 15km from Bhubaneswar, is a small village with an important **Yogini Temple**, one of only four in India. The low, circular structure, open to the sky, has 64 niches within, each with a black chlorite goddess. Getting here requires hired transport or coming on a customised tour from Bhubaneswar.

PIPLI

This colourful town, 16km southeast of Bhubaneswar, is notable for its brilliant appliqué craft, which incorporates small mirrors and is used for door and wall hangings

and the more traditional canopies hung over Lord Jagannath and family during festival time. Lampshades and parasols hanging outside the shops turn the main road into an avenue of rainbow colours. The work is still done by local families in workshops behind the shops; you may be able to go back and have a look. During Diwali, it's particularly vibrant. Pipli is easily accessible by any bus between Bhubaneswar and Puri or Konark.

SOUTHEASTERN ODISHA**Puri**

📍06752 / POP 157,610

Hindu pilgrims, Indian holidaymakers and foreign travellers all make their way to Puri, setting up camp in different parts of town. For Hindus, Puri is one of the holiest pilgrimage places in India, with religious life revolving around the great Jagannath Mandir and its famous Rath Yatra (Car Festival).

Puri's other attraction is its long, sandy beach and esplanade. Backing this, on New Marine Rd, is a long ribbon of hotels, resorts and company holiday homes that become instantly full when Kolkata rejoices in a holiday – great for an evening stroll.

In the 1970s travellers on the hippie trail through Southeast Asia were attracted here by the sea and bhang, legal in Shiva's Puri. There's little trace of that scene today (though the bhang hasn't departed); travellers come just to hang out and recharge their backpacking spirit.

WORTH A TRIP**SATKOSIA GORGE SANCTUARY**

This 795-sq-km **Sanctuary** (www.satkosia.org; per day Indian/foreigner ₹20/1000; ☀6am-7pm), 190km west of Bhubaneswar, is part of the larger Satkosia Tiger Reserve, inaugurated in 2007 by combining adjoining Satkosia Gorge and Baisipalli wildlife sanctuaries. The reserve is straddled by the breathtaking gorge, cut by the mighty Mahanadi River, one of the most beautiful natural spots in all of Odisha, if not India. Among its 38 recorded species of mammals, significant populations of Gharial crocodiles, leopards, elephants, sambar, wild dogs, jackals and giant squirrels call the reserve home – and at least 18 tigers.

The main entry gate of the tiger reserve is at Pampasar, 30km southwest of Angul. There are three sets of excellent **forest rest houses** (d ₹550) in the park, but forget about those. Where you want to be is the **Nature Camp** (📞0674-236218; dfosatkosiaw@ yahoo.co.in; tents incl meals ₹1500-2000; 🌞1 Nov-31 Mar), perched right on the golden sand beaches of the Mahanadi River at Tikarpada with the gorge as the scenic backdrop. Here the double-bedded tents with toilets and water supply are Odisha's most storybook setting.

The action is along a few kilometres of coast, with the backpacker village clustered around Chakra Tirtha (CT) Rd to the east, busy New Marine Rd to the west and resorts in the middle. A few blocks inland is the holy quarter's chaotic but fascinating jumble of streets.

Dangers & Annoyances

Ocean currents can become treacherous in Puri, and drownings are not uncommon, so don't venture out beyond your depth. Ask one of the *nolias* (fishermen/lifeguards), with their white-painted, cone-shaped wicker hats, for the best spots.

Muggings and attacks on women have been reported along isolated stretches of beach, even during the day, so take care. Young boys may approach foreign men on the beach; Puri has an ongoing problem with paedophiles abusing local youngsters.

Sights



Jagannath Mandir

HINDU TEMPLE

This mighty temple belongs to Jagannath, Lord of the Universe and incarnation of Vishnu. The jet-black deity with large, round, white eyes is hugely popular across Odisha; figures of Jagannath are tended and regularly dressed in new clothes at shrines across the state. Built in its present form in 1198, the temple (closed to non-Hindus) is surrounded by two walls; its 58m-high *sikhara* (spire) is topped by the flag and wheel of Vishnu.

Guarded by two stone lions and a pillar crowned by the Garuda that once stood at the Sun Temple at Konark, the eastern entrance (Lion Gate) is the passageway for the chariot procession of Rath Yatra.

Jagannath, brother Balbhadra and sister Subhadra reside supreme in the central *jagamohan* (assembly hall). Priests continually garland and dress the three throughout the day for different ceremonies. Incredibly, the temple employs about 6000 men to perform the complicated rituals involved in caring for the gods. An estimated 20,000 people – divided into 36 orders and 97 classes – are dependent on Jagannath for their livelihood.

Non-Hindus can spy from the roof of **Ragunandan Library** (cnr Temple Rd & Swargadwar Rd; ☉9am-2pm & 4-6pm Mon-Sat) opposite; a 'donation', while not officially compulsory, is expected (₹10 is fine). The library is closed on Sunday, so tourists who will help you to a nearby rooftop prey on tourists and demand ₹100 – easily negotiated down to ₹50.

Beach

BEACH

Puri is no palm-fringed paradise – the beach is wide, shelves quickly with a nasty shore break and is shadeless. It could also use a clean-up. But it is the seaside and offers the best beach vibe in Odisha, with dramatic sunsets and a lingering hippie atmosphere.

By New Marine Rd (the 'Indian side' or 'Puri I') the beach is healthier (although still not particularly pleasant for swimming) and often crowded with energetic holidaymakers, especially at night, where there is lots of hangout action on the long esplanade. Be on the look out for artists constructing **sand sculptures**, a local art form. To the east it's a public toilet for the fishing village.

Swargdwar

LANDMARK

(off New Marine Rd; ☉24hr) These hallowed cremation grounds are the end stop of choice for Eastern India's Hindu population and beyond – some 40 bodies are cremated here daily. Anyone can watch or walk among the open-air ceremonies providing you are behaving in a respectful manner and not taking photos. It's an obviously solemn affair, but a fascinating glimpse into Puri's role as one of India's holiest cities.

Tours

OTDC (☎223526; New Marine Rd; ☉6am-10pm) runs a series of day trips. Tour 1 (AC/non-AC ₹350/250, departs 6.30am Tuesday to Sunday) skips through Konark, Dhauli, Bhubaneswar's temples, Udayagiri and Khandagiri Caves plus Nandankanan Zoo. Tour 2 (AC/non-AC ₹250/150, departs 7am daily) goes for a boat jaunt on Chilika Lake. Various admission fees are additional to the tour cost. Tours begin and end at various points including the Odisha Tourism office and the Chanakya BNR Hotel.

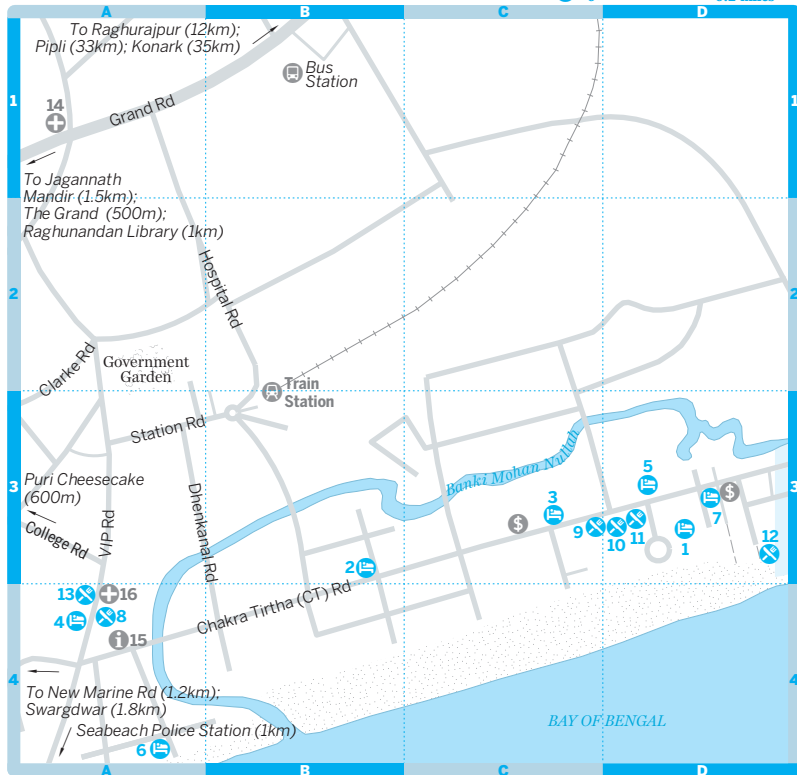
Several tour operators organise tours into Odisha's tribal areas that can include visits to handicraft villages plus Similipal National Park and Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary. Tribal tours have to be approached cautiously as not all agencies have the necessary local contacts to conduct a responsible tour. For recommended options in Bhubaneswar see p590 and for more details see p605.



Grass Routes Journeys

TRIBAL/CULTURAL

(☎226642, 9437029698; www.grassroutesjourneys.com; CT Rd; ☉8am-1pm & 4-9pm) This Australian-Indian agency works from a sustainable philosophy and has its heart in the right place – contacts in the tribal com-



munities, policies about appropriate ways to photograph people and contributions to the welfare of the community are pluses. It also does excellent trips to Chilika Lake and Satkosia Gorge.



Heritage Tours

CULTURAL, WILDLIFE

(☎223656; www.heritagetoursOdisha.com; Mayfair Beach Resort; ☀8am-8pm) A sustainable tribal and cultural tourism veteran, but also interesting for its **Green Riders** program in which 75 cycle rickshaw drivers are trained weekly in fixed pricing, self-respect and why spiking prices for foreign tourists is uncool. In addition to transport, the program offers a wealth of local cycle-rickshaw tours to fascinating parts of old Puri you would never otherwise see.



Festivals

Highlights of the festival-packed year include the celebrated festival of **Rath Yatra**

(p585) and the **Puri Beach Festival** (23–27 November) featuring magnificent sand art, food stalls, traditional dance and other cultural programs.



Sleeping

For Rath Yatra, Durga Puja (Dussehra), Diwali or the end of December and New Year, book well in advance.

Prices given are for October to February. Significant discounts can be negotiated during the monsoon, while prices can triple during a festival. Many hotels have early checkout times – often 8am. A 10% service charge is frequently levied.



Hotel Gandhara

HOTEL \$

(☎224117; www.hotelgandhara.com; CT Rd; s/d ₹450/550, with AC & breakfast ₹1888/1999; 🍷🍴📞) The Indian-Japanese-owned Gandhara blows away the competition for friendliness, services and value, remarkably outpunching its

Puri

Activities, Courses & Tours

- Grass Routes Journeys..... (see 11)
Heritage Tours..... (see 6)

Sleeping

- 1 Baywatch Residency.....D3
2 Chanakya BNR Hotel.....B3
3 Hotel Gandara.....C3
4 Hotel Lee Garden.....A4
5 Hotel Lotus.....D3
6 Mayfair Beach Resort.....A4
7 Z Hotel.....D3

Eating

- 8 Aero Dine.....A4
Chung Wah..... (see 4)
9 Dakshin.....C3
10 Honey Bee Bakery & Pizzeria.....D3
11 Peace Restaurant.....D3
12 Pink House Restaurant.....D3
13 Wildgrass Restaurant.....A4

Shopping

- Grocery Stores.....(see 5)

Information

- Ghandara International..... (see 3)
14 Headquarters Hospital..... A1
15 Odisha Tourism.....A4
16 Swapu.....A4

Transport

- Bike & Motorcycle Rental.....(see 5)

weight class. There's a wide range of bright rooms for different budgets in the white-washed, once-regal building. The rear five-storey block has rooftop AC rooms catching breezes and views and free wi-fi; others are arrayed around a tree-shaded garden with balconies. There's a friendly dog named after an Indian soda, international cable channels, full-on Western breakfast and self-service beer – rare as a porterhouse in Puri!

Chanakya BNR Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(☎223006; www.therailhotel.com.com; CT Rd; r incl breakfast ₹2500; 🍷🍷) This sprawling historic railway hotel has received a long overdue makeover, catapulting it to one of Puri's most interesting lodging options. Looming archways and wide hallways lead to spacious, hardwood-floored rooms with 2.7m doors and modern furnishings. There are beautiful historic touches throughout, most notably the dark, 90-year-old Lac mural art in the lobby stairwell and restaurant.

Mayfair Beach Resort

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎227800; www.mayfairhotels.com; r incl breakfast from ₹7500; 🍷🍷🍷) The benchmark for Puri luxury features spacious units nestled in idyllic gardens dotted with carved statues. Its stretch of beach is cleaned and maintained by the resort and a good spot to kick away a day guest or not, and the white-wicker charm of the Verandah deck restaurant (excellent *sarison macha*) makes it a lovely refuelling setting.

Z Hotel

HERITAGE HOTEL \$

(☎222554; www.zhotelindia.com; CT Rd; dm women only ₹100, s/d without bathroom ₹250/500, d ₹700, with AC ₹1500; 🍷) This former maharaja's home has huge, clean, airy rooms, many of them facing the sea, and new ones with AC and excellent bathrooms. Great common areas include a TV room with movies screened nightly. The heritage vibe and traveller's scene here – rare in Odisha – trumps the hospitality, which is nonexistent. Despite its flaws (no toilet paper, no internet, among others), it's one of Puri's most atmospheric choices.

Baywatch Residency

HOTEL \$

(☎226133; www.baywatchculturalresidency.com; off CT Rd; s/d ₹600/750, with AC ₹1200/1350; 🍷) It's pricier and there's no beach creeping under the door, but rupee pinchers seeking sand adjacent will be far happier in this simple abode with huge, big-value rooms that are just clean enough. Non-AC 3rd-floor rooms 301, 302 and 304 are massive, with extra living rooms and small seaweed balconies. There's a small temple bellowing right outside most rooms and a 15% discount for anyone working in arts or culture.

Hotel Lee Garden

HOTEL \$

(☎9040747616, lee_garden@rediffmail.com; VIP Rd; d from ₹650, with AC from ₹1100; 🍷🍷) As was clearly pointed out to us, 90% of the clientele here is West Bengali tourists (hence the 7.30am checkout time, due to train arrivals from there), so perhaps the harsh welcome is explained by a lack of concern for foreign tourism? It's too bad, really. The rooms are spotless and good value, all dangerously too close to the excellent Chinese restaurant, **Chung Wah**, which tastes a lot better than the reception.

Hotel Lotus

HOTEL \$

(☎227033; CT Rd; d/q from ₹300/450, with AC ₹950; 🍷) A range of inexpensive rooms that are clean and comfortable. The non-AC rooms are some of the best value for

money in Puri, though the front rooms may suffer a bit of street noise.

Eating

There's excellent fresh seafood to be enjoyed almost anywhere in Puri, and in CT Rd homesick travellers can find muesli and pancakes. Low-season opening times can be a bit random.



Chung Wah

INDO-CHINESE \$\$

(VIP Rd; mains ₹110-180; ☺lunch & dinner) The real thing courtesy of a Chinese family transplanted from Kolkata 40 years ago. Chung Wah's menu is loaded down with spicy Szechwan dishes that bite back. Try the excellent hot garlic chicken, Szechwan prawns or go fusion: Kung Pao *paneer*, which has a much catchier ring to it than Kung Pao Chicken. It's great by any standard, but if you've been on the all-Indian diet for any length of time, it's salvation.

Honey Bee Bakery & Pizzeria

ITALIAN CAFE \$\$

(CT Rd; set breakfast ₹110-150, mains ₹60-270; ☺8.30am-2pm & 6-10pm) Decent pizzas and pancakes, filtered coffee and espresso, toasted sandwiches and fry-up brekkies (including bacon!) – all the comforts of home are here. It's Puri's tried and true traveller hang-out.

Aero Dine

INDIAN/MULTICUISINE \$\$

(Hotel Shakti International, VIP Rd; mains ₹90-300) Is this the mess hall on the Starship Enterprise? This very surprising place will throw your holidays for a loop with its white modular furniture, random flashing lights and monitors, and overall space-age decor. The menu brings you back down to earth a little with great Indian, Chinese and Continental standards, along with a few wildcards like Cajun chicken and crêpes Suzette.

Wildgrass Restaurant

INDIAN \$\$

(VIP Rd; mains ₹60-150; ☺lunch & dinner) With mismatched sculptures and precarious tree

huts scattered through its grounds, Wildgrass is a secret garden gone wild. The Indian and Continental menu is enlivened with good-value seafood dishes and Odishan specialties.

Grand

INDIAN \$\$

(Grand Rd; mains ₹55-110) This pure veg monstrosity has good grub and snacks throughout the day – the *bhindi chatpati* (okra) and *gobi Hyderabad* (cauliflower) are both commendable, but it's more notable for its open-air terrace, from which there are striking views of Jagannath Mandir and the hub-bub of Grand Rd below. From the temple, it's 100m down Grand Rd.

Peace Restaurant

INDIAN \$\$

(CT Rd; mains ₹40-180) 'World famous in Puri but never heard of anywhere else.' So reads the menu, which features curries, macaroni, the best muesli in town (₹70) and tasty fish dishes.

Dakshin

SOUTH INDIAN \$

(CT Rd; dosas ₹25-35, thali ₹50) Standing out in CT Rd's string of ageing sand-floor banana-pancake joints, this clean place has a simple menu of well-prepared South Indian dishes. Thalīs and *masala dosas* are outstanding.

Pink House Restaurant

INDIAN/SEAFOOD \$\$

(off CT Rd; mains ₹60-130) Solid seafood on the sands – like night and day compared to the hotel.



Shopping

Shops along New Marine Rd sell fabric, beads, shells, saris and bamboo work, while shops on CT Rd sell typical all-India trinkets.

Near Jagannath Mandir, many places sell Jagannath images, palm-leaf paintings, handicrafts and Odishan hand-woven *ikat*, which you can buy in lengths or as ready-made garments.

DON'T MISS

PURIFECTLY SWEET

The narrow lanes of Puri's holy quarter are full of makeshift sweet shops, perhaps none more famous than **Puri Cheesecake** (Dolamandap Sahi, Temple Rd). Bikram Sahoo and his six brothers have been churning out this unique Puri delight for 45 years. It's cottage cheese, sugar and cardamom cooked in an iron pan over an open flame. Though it's more like a flan than traditional cheesecake, it's off the mark by name only. A real treat and just ₹15 per piece. To find it, walk down Temple Rd from Jagannath Mandir and it's about 400m on your right.

A couple of general grocery stores on CT Rd (mainly around the Hotel Lotus) stock a good range of toiletries that might be hard to find elsewhere in Odisha, eg women's deodorant.

i Information

The main traveller-hotel stretch of CT Rd is a zoo of travel agents and moneychangers. Internet places have sprung up here; most charge ₹20 per hour. As well as a convenient branch in CT Rd, the State Bank of India has a number of reliable MasterCard and Visa ATMs around town.

Gandhara International (☎2224623; www.hotelgandhara.com; Hotel Gandhara, CT Rd; ☎8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sun) Travel agency.

Headquarters Hospital (☎223742; Grand Rd)

ICICI Bank (Grand Rd; ☎8am-8pm) MasterCard and Visa ATM; does foreign exchange but not travellers cheques.

Odisha Tourism CT Rd (☎222664; CT Rd; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Sat); train station ☎6am-10pm) Tourist information, hotel, vehicle and tour booking, and a convenient start/finish point for day tours, though not particularly friendly.

Police Station Seabeach (☎222025; CT Rd); Town (☎222039; Grand Rd)

Post office (cnr Kutchery & Temple Rd; ☎10am-6pm Mon-Sat)

Samikshya Forex (CT Rd; ☎9am-10pm) Cashes travellers cheques and foreign currencies.

Swapu (VIP Rd) Probably Odisha's nicest pharmacy.

i Getting There & Away

Bus

From the sprawling bus station near Gundicha Mandir, frequent buses serve Konark (₹17, one hour), Satapada (₹25, three hours), Bhubaneswar (₹32, two hours) and Kolkata (₹260 to ₹775, 12 hours). For Pipli and Raghurajpur, take the Bhubaneswar bus. For other destinations change at Bhubaneswar.

Train

Book well ahead if travelling during holiday and festival times. The booking counter at the train station can become incredibly crowded, but CT Rd agencies will book tickets for a small fee.

The 12801 *Purushottam Express* travels to Delhi (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹493/1330/1822, 32 hours, 9.50pm), while Howrah can be reached on the 12838 *Puri-Howrah Express* (sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹244/631/852/1416, nine hours, 8.05pm) and the 18410 *Sri Jagannath Express* (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹224/601/822, 10 hours, 10.50pm), both also stop in Balisore for access to Similipal National

Park. The 12875 *Neelachal Express* goes to Varanasi (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹371/988/1348, 21 hours, 10.55am), continuing to Delhi, on Tuesday, Friday and Sunday. To Sambalpur, the 18304 *Puri-Sambalpur Express* (2nd class/chair ₹97/343, six hours, 3.45pm), runs daily. For Gopalpur-on-Sea, the 17479 *Puri-Tirupati Express* departs at 1pm (sleeper/3AC ₹120/301, five hours) daily except Tuesday and Saturday to Berhampur.

i Getting Around

A few places along CT Rd (mainly around the Hotel Lotus) rent bicycles from ₹40 per day, and mopeds and motorcycles for ₹150 to ₹300. From CT Rd, cycle-rickshaws charge about ₹40 to the train station, bus station or Jagannath Mandir. Look for the appropriately attired Green Riders (p596) for no-hassle pricing.

Raghurajpur

The fascinating artists' village of Raghurajpur, 14km north of Puri, is two streets and 120 thatched brick houses adorned with murals of geometric patterns and mythological scenes – a traditional art form that has almost died out in Odisha.

The village is most famous for its *patachitra* – work made using cloth coated with a mixture of gum and chalk made from tamarind seeds and then polished. With eye-aching attention and a very fine brush, artists mark out animals, flowers, gods and demons, which are then illuminated with bright colours. It makes for very beautiful and unique souvenirs.

Take the Bhubaneswar bus and look for the 'Raghurajpur The Craft Village' signpost 11km north of Puri, then walk the last 1km (don't get cornered by the few shops that have set up first but technically outside the village itself).

Konark

☎06758 / POP 15,020

The iconic Sun Temple at Konark – a Unesco World Heritage Site – is one of India's signature buildings and Odisha's *raison d'être*. Most visitors are day-trippers from Bhubaneswar or Puri, but a new beach 'resort' nearby in Ramchandi Beach should tempt more travellers to sleep over. After all, the temple is most majestic at dawn.

Originally nearer the coast (the sea has receded 3km), Konark was visible from far out at sea and known as the 'Black Pagoda'

by sailors, in contrast to Puri's whitewashed Jagannath. The inland lighthouse near Chandrabhaga Beach is odd testament to that fact.

Sights

Archaeological Museum

MUSEUM

(admission ₹10; ☀8am-5pm) This interesting (and refreshingly cool and quiet) museum, just west of Yatri Nivas, contains many impressive sculptures and carvings found during excavations of the Sun Temple.

Chandrabhaga Beach

BEACH

The local beach at Chandrabhaga is 3km from the temple down the Puri road. Walk, cycle or take an autorickshaw (₹60 return), or use the Konark-Puri bus. The beach is quieter and cleaner than Puri's, but beware of strong currents; there have also been reports of thefts on the beach. To the east is a fishing village with plenty of boating activity at sunrise.

Festivals & Events

The **Konark Festival**, steeped in traditional music and dance, takes place every December with the gorgeous Sun Temple as a backdrop.

Sleeping & Eating



Lotus Eco Village

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎236161; www.lotusresorthotels.com; Puri-Konark Marine Drive; villas/cottages incl breakfast from ₹5500/7500; 📍) About 7km from the Sun Temple on pretty Ramchandi Beach, this new collection of rustic Canadian pine cottages is Konark's only beach 'resort'. It's in a beautiful spot across a calm and swimmable islet catering to a few local fisherman and not much else; villas are surprisingly stylish inside and amenities include a small Ayurvedic spa, a nice sandside restaurant (mains ₹50 to ₹200) and an organic vegetable garden.

DON'T MISS

SUN TEMPLE

The massive **Sun Temple** (Indian/foreigner ₹10/250, video ₹25, guide per hr ₹100; ☀dawn-8pm) was constructed in the mid-13th century, probably by Odishan king Narashimhadev I to celebrate his military victory over the Muslims, and was in use for maybe only three centuries. In the late 16th century the 40m-high *sikhara* (spire) partially collapsed: speculation about causes ranges from marauding Mughals removing the copper over the cupola to a ransacking Kalapahad displacing the Dadinauti (arch stone), to simple wear and tear from recurring cyclones – the truth was apparently lost with Konark's receding shoreline. The entire temple was conceived as the cosmic chariot of the sun god Surya. Seven mighty prancing horses (representing the days of the week) rear at the strain of moving this stone leviathan on 24 stone cartwheels (representing the hours of the day) that stand around the base. The temple was positioned so that dawn light would illuminate the *deul* (temple sanctury) interior and the presiding deity, which may have been moved to Jagannath Mandir in Puri in the 17th century.

The **gajasimha** (main entrance) is guarded by two stone lions crushing elephants and leads to the intricately carved **nritya mandapa** (dancing hall). Steps, flanked by straining horses, rise to the still-standing **jagamohan**. Behind is the spireless **deul**, with its three impressive chlorite images of Surya aligned to catch the sun at dawn, noon and sunset.

The base and walls present a chronicle in stone of Kalinga life; you'll see women cooking and men hunting. Many are in the erotic style for which Konark is famous and include entwined couples as well as solitary exhibitionists.

Around the grounds are a small shrine called **Mayadevi Mandir**; a deep, covered **well**; and the ruins of a **brick temple**. To the north are a couple of **elephant statues**, to the south a couple of **horse statues**, both trampling soldiers.

If there's anywhere worth hiring a guide, it's here. The temple's history is a complicated amalgam of fact and legend, and religious and secular imagery, and the guides' explanations are thought-provoking. They'll also show you features you might otherwise overlook – the woman with Japanese sandals, a giraffe (proving this area once traded with Africa) and even a man treating himself for venereal disease! Be sure your guide is registered. There are only 29 registered guides in Konark, listed on the name board by the entrance.

Labanya Lodge

(☎9937073559; labanyalodge1@rediffmail.com; Sea Beach Rd; s ₹100-150, d ₹350-750, r with AC ₹850; 📍📞) The best budget choice, this friendly place has a garden and a fresh coconut drink to welcome guests. The bright-coloured rooms come in different sizes, and there's a rooftop terrace. This is the only internet facility (per hour ₹60) in town and there's bike hire (per day ₹25).

HOTEL \$

Yatri Nivas

(☎236820; yatrivivas@konark.das@gmail.com; d from ₹450, with AC from ₹750; 📍📞) A little slap of fresh paint could do wonders for this OTDC hotel, set in a large, well-manicured garden next to the museum. Cheaper rooms are clean but unremarkable while deluxe rooms are nicer but not worth double the rupees.

HOTEL \$

Suntemple Hotel

(mains ₹40-180) A busy, friendly place with a big range of Indian veg and non-veg dishes, including recommended seafood dishes. It also takes a decent stab at traveller favourites like chips and banana pancakes.

INDIAN \$\$

1 Information

The road from Bhubaneswar swings around the temple and past a couple of hotels and eateries before continuing to meet the coastal road to Puri. To the north and east of the temple is the **post office** (☉10am-5pm Mon-Sat), a State Bank of India ATM, the bus station and numerous souvenir shops. The **tourist office** (☎236821; Yatrivivas hotel; ☉10am) can line up a registered guide to meet you at the temple.

1 Getting There & Away

Overcrowded minibuses regularly run along the coastal road between Puri and Konark (₹17, one hour). There are also regular departures to Bhubaneswar (₹40, two hours). Konark is included in OTDC tours from Bhubaneswar and Puri. An autorickshaw will take you to Puri, with a beach stop along the way, with negotiations usually beginning around ₹350 depending on the season. Because the road is flat, some diehards even cycle the 36km from Puri.

Chilika Lake

Chilika Lake is Asia's largest brackish lagoon. Swelling from 600 sq km in April/May to 1100 sq km in the monsoon, the shallow lake is separated from the Bay of Bengal by a 60km-long sand bar called Rajhansa.

The lake is noted for the million-plus migratory birds – including grey-legged geese,

herons, cranes and pink flamingos – that flock here in winter (from November to mid-January) from as far away as Siberia and Iran and concentrate in a 3-sq-km area within the bird sanctuary on Nalabana Island.

Other attractions are rare Irrawaddy dolphins near Satapada, the pristine beach along Rajhansa, and Kalijai Island temple where Hindu pilgrims flock for the Makar Mela festival in January.

SATAPADA

☎06752

This small village, on a headland jutting southwestwards into the lake, is the starting point for most boat trips. There's an **Odisha Tourism office** (☎262077; Yatri Nivas hotel) here.

Boat trips from Satapada usually cruise towards the new sea mouth for a paddle in the sea and some dolphin and bird-spotting en route. Travellers have reported dolphins being (illegally) herded and otherwise harassed; make it clear you don't want this.

OTDC (☎262077; Yatri Nivas hotel) has boats for hire (for large groups) or a three-hour tour (per person ₹100) at 10.30am, with another at 2pm if demand warrants.

Dolphin Motor Boat Association

(☎9090881551; Satapada jetty; 1-8hr trips per boat ₹600-1800), a cooperative of local boat owners, has set-price trips mixing in dolphin sightseeing, Nalabana Bird Sanctuary and Kalijai Island temple.

Chilika Visitor Centre (admission ₹10; ☉10am-5pm) is an exhibition on the lake, its wildlife and its human inhabitants. The centre has an upstairs observatory with a telescope and bird identification charts.

A regular ferry (₹15, three hours) plies between Satapada and Balugaon just north of Barkul, departing at 1pm and returning at 7am the next day. Travel agents lining CT Rd in Puri can organise return trips on crowded buses for around ₹150, but four or more will be far more comfortable in a taxi (₹650), including about four hours in Satapada where you can organise your own boat.

Yatri Nivas (☎262077; d ₹460, with AC ₹1150; 📍) is typically rundown but perhaps the most architecturally interesting of the government-run hotels, with its elevated walkways. The best rooms have balconies with lake views. The restaurant (mains ₹20 to ₹100) has a small selection of standard Indian fare and a couple of seafood dishes.

Several shops and food stalls line the road to the jetty. Don't forget to take water on your boat trip.

BARKUL

📍06756

On the northern shore of Chilika, Barkul is just a scatter of houses, basic 'lodges' and food stalls on a lane off NH5. From here boats go to Nalabana and Kalijai Island. Nalabana is best visited in early morning and late afternoon, November to late February.

With a minimum of seven people, the **OTDC** (Panthanivas Barkul) runs tours to Kalijia (₹50), and Nalabana and Kalijia (₹150). Otherwise, a boat with a quiet engine (that doesn't scare birds) can be hired from ₹450 to ₹1600 per hour. Private boat owners (with no insurance and often no safety gear) charge around ₹450 an hour; a recommended operator is fisherman **Babu Behera** (📞9937226378).

Panthanivas Barkul (📍220488; r ₹750, with AC ₹1700; 🍽️🍷) has a great setting, with comfortable rooms overlooking the garden to the lake. Newer cottages are clean and inviting, with lake views, but the most interesting option is the new houseboat, where an overnight stay, food and a two-hour cruise goes for ₹5500 (double occupancy).

Frequent buses dash along NH5 between Bhubaneswar (₹45) and Berhampur (₹30). You can get off anywhere en route.

A ferry (₹15) goes to Satapada at 7am from Balugaon, a couple of kilometres north of Barkul – autos and taxis whiz up and down the route.

RAMBHA

📍06810

The small town of Rambha is the nearest stay to turtle watching on Rushikulya beach. Not as commercial as Barkul, Rambha is a very pleasant little backwater.

Panthanivas Rambha (📍278346; dm ₹180, d ₹650, d/d cottage with AC ₹1200/2400; 🍽️), about 200m off the main road, and 1km west of Rambha centre, looks a tad battered outside but has fine rooms (the AC rooms are better) with big clean bathrooms and

balconies overlooking the lake. Newer cottages hog the charm and views, and all beds have mozzie nets. The restaurant (mains ₹30 to ₹100) is very good, especially the seafood. One-hour speedboat or three-hour motor boat tours of the lake are ₹1500.

There are regular bus services to/from Bhubaneswar (₹100) and Berhampur (₹20).

Gopalpur-On-Sea

📍0680 / POP 6660

If you dig nosing about crumbling seaside resorts, Gopalpur-on-Sea, a seaside town the British left to slide into history until Bengali holidaymakers rediscovered its attractions in the 1980s, is your bygone living museum on the ocean. Prior to this, it had a noble history as a seaport with connections to Southeast Asia, the evidence of which is still scattered through the town in the form of romantically deteriorating old buildings.

It's no paradise, but the peaceful and relatively clean beach is great for a stroll and it's oddly charismatic in its own strange, antiquated way. People often tack on a few days here.

Swimming in the nasty shore break at Gopalpur, where there are undercurrents, is dodgy, but it doesn't stop locals.

👁️ Sights**Lighthouse**

LANDMARK

(Indian/foreigner/child ₹10/25/3, camera ₹20; 🕒3.30-5.30pm) Peering over the town is the lighthouse, with its immaculate gardens and petite staff cottages. It's a late-afternoon draw card and after puffing up the spiral staircase you're rewarded with expansive views and welcome cooling breezes.

🍴 Sleeping & Eating

Gopalpur-on-Sea can be booked out during holiday and festival time. Prices here are for

WORTH A TRIP**MANGALAJODI**

On Chilika's north shore, 60km northwest of Bhubaneswar, is this haven for resident and migratory birds, an ecotourism success story virtually unknown to the outside world until 2006. Six years prior, Sir Naiver Pikas Sargasso started Wild Oriss, a waterfowl safeguard committee that began the arduous process of converting bird poachers into protectors ...and now ecotourism guides. In just a decade, the waterfowl population has climbed from 5000 to an estimated 40,000, spread among some 160 species. It's all best viewed on a sunrise canoe ride in winter, when tepid sunlight illuminates the waters and the cackle of various species of ducks provides the only soundtrack.

ODISHA'S OLIVE RIDLEY TURTLES

One of the smallest sea turtles and a threatened species, the olive ridley marine turtle swims up from deeper waters beyond Sri Lanka to mate and lay eggs on Odisha's beaches. The main nesting sites are Gahirmatha (Bhitarkanika National Park), Devi near Konark and Rushikulya.

Turtle deaths due to fishing practices are unfortunately common. Although there are regulations, such as requiring the use of turtle exclusion devices (TEDs) on nets and banning fishing from certain areas, these laws are routinely flouted in Odisha.

Casuarina trees have been planted to help preserve Devi beach but they occupy areas of soft sand that are necessary for a turtle hatchery. Other potential threats include nearby port developments and oil exploration.

In January and February the turtles congregate near nesting beaches and, if conditions are right, come ashore. If conditions aren't right, they reabsorb their eggs and leave without nesting.

Hatchlings emerge 50 to 55 days later and are guided to the sea by the luminescence of the ocean and stars. They can be easily distracted by bright lights; unfortunately NH5 runs within 2km of Rushikulya beach. Members of local turtle clubs in the Sea Turtle Protection Committee gather up disoriented turtles and take them to the sea.

The best place to see nesting and hatching is on the northern side of Rushikulya River, near the villages of Purunabandh and Gokharkuda, 20km from the nearest accommodation in Rambha. During nesting and hatching, activity takes place throughout the night: don't use lights.

Ask staff at Panthanivas Rambha (p602) what conditions are like, or contact the **Wildlife Society of Odisha** (☎0674-2311513; www.wildlifeOdisha.org; A320, Sahid Nagar, Bhubaneswar). Rickshaws between Rambha and Rushikulya cost ₹250 return if you stay an hour or two, ₹500 for the whole day.

the high season (November to January); discounts are available at other times.

Hotel Sea Pearl

HOTEL \$

(☎2242556; d ₹650-850, with AC ₹1150-1500; ☹) Any nearer the sea and it'd be in it; the big and popular Sea Pearl has some great rooms, especially the upper-storey, beach-facing, non-AC rooms, and a little private entrance to the beach. Look at a few rooms; price doesn't necessarily reflect quality here. There is a standard Indian-Chinese restaurant (mains ₹50 to ₹120).

Hotel Green Park

HOTEL \$

(☎2243716; greenpark016@yahoo.com; d from ₹330, with AC ₹770; ☹) One street back from the beach, Green Park is a clean, friendly and good-value option. Some rooms have front-facing balconies and there's 24-hour checkout.

Swosti Palm Resort

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2243718; www.swosti.com; Main Rd; s/d ₹2600/3200; ☹@) Further back, and an unfortunate walk past a rubbish tip, the Swosti has the best accommodation in town with comfortable, well-appointed rooms. The excellent multicuisine restaurant, Lighthouse,

serves good seafood including authentic local dishes (mains ₹110 to ₹220) – and the cosy bar is the town's one-man show, with an unusually varied selection of Indian beers.

Krishna's

INDIAN, CHINESE \$

(mains ₹10-70) Mainly Indian and Chinese standards (nicely executed) and excellent *kati rolls* (p465). In the quiet season, if you ask, the kitchen can produce good pancakes, pasta and fried calamari or fish and chips. Expect to pay ₹100 and up, though, for some of the seafood. On our visit, the 'chef' was 17 years old, part of the super-friendly owner's plan to give less fortunate youth a marketable skill.

Getting There & Away

Frequent, crowded minibuses travel to Bherampur (₹10, one hour), where you can catch onward transport by rail or bus. Alternatively, an autorickshaw will cost you about ₹150.

WESTERN ODISHA

Although permits are no longer necessary, foreigners venturing into the tribal areas independently with plans to camp should register their details with the police in the

nearest city as a safety precaution. This is all done for you if you are on a tour or by your hotel otherwise.

Rayagada

📍06856

Big and gritty Rayagada is the base for visiting the weekly Wednesday **Chatikona market** at Bissamcuttack (about 40km north). Here, highly ornamented Dongria Kondh and Desia Kondh villagers from the surrounding Niayangiri Hills bring their produce and wares to sell. Alongside piles of chillies and dried fish are bronze animal sculptures made locally using the lost wax method.

The new **Hotel Raj** (📍222270; Main Rd; dm 12/24hr ₹100/200, s ₹300-400, d ₹350-450, with AC ₹575/700; 🏠) is notable for its rare (though close-quarters) dorm; cheap, well-maintained rooms and restaurant and sweet shop. At the friendly **Hotel Rajbhavan** (📍223777; Main Rd; r from ₹600, with AC from ₹1100; 🏠), stick to higher category rooms. There's a good multicuisine restaurant (mains ₹50 to ₹140). Both are just across the main road from the train station. **Hotel Sai International** (📍225554; JK Rd; s/d ₹600/700, with AC from ₹1100/1200; 🏠) is marginally the most comfortable and has a great multicuisine restaurant (mains ₹50 to ₹165).

There are three early morning local buses to Chatikona (₹20, two hours, 5.30am, 6.30am and 8am); as well as Jeypore (₹60 to ₹80, five hours) and Bhubaneswar (₹280, 12 hours). The 8447 *Hirakhand Express* leaves Bhubaneswar daily at 7.35pm and reaches Rayagada at 4.50am on its way to Koraput.

Jeypore

📍06854 / POP 77,000

Jeypore is the traditional though least interesting base for visiting the amazingly colourful Onkadelli market. There is little reason to choose here over Koraput other than the 22km head start to Onkadelli. Modern, two-star side-by-side sister hotels **Hotel Mani Krishna** (📍321139; manikrishna_hotels@yahoo.com; MG Rd; s/d ₹595/695, with AC from ₹895/995; 🏠) and **Hotel Sai Krishna** (📍230253; www.hotelsaikrishna.com; MG Rd; s/d ₹595/695, with AC from ₹1295/1495; 🏠) offer spotless rooms, international cable and room service (at Mani) and a great Indian restaurant (at Sai). **Hello Jeypore** (📍231127; www.hoteljeypore.com; NH Rd; s/d incl breakfast

from ₹795/995, with AC ₹995/1195; 🏠🏠) is the most comfortable. Freshly made-over rooms are shockingly boutique, including a few all-white minimalist retreats.

From the main bus station there are frequent buses to Koraput (₹15, one hour); others go to Berhampur (₹235 to ₹260, 12 hours), Bhubaneswar (₹360, 12 to 16 hours) and Rayagada (₹84, five hours).

To reach Onkadelli (₹35, three hours) there are three morning buses, at 7am from the bus station, and 9am and 11.30am from the Ghoroi Bus Union's office on Bypass Rd.

Koraput

📍06852

Koraput is just a few kilometres from Jeypore and is a far more interesting base for visits to Onkadelli. The temple is fascinating, especially for non-Hindus who couldn't enter the Jagannath temple in Puri.

The **tourist office** (📍250318; Jeypore Rd; ☎️10am-9pm, closed 2nd Sat of month) has information and can arrange car hire. It's housed in the stuck-in-limbo Panthanivas Koraput, which may never open.

The **Jagannath temple** has an exhibition of gods of the different states of India. There's also a selection of local forms of *ossa* (also known as *rangoli*), traditional patterns made with white and coloured powders on doorsteps. At the back of the temple is a series of apses containing statuettes of Jagannath in his various guises and costumes.

The brand-spanking-new **Raj Residency** (📍251591; www.hotelrajresidency.com; Post Office Rd; s/d ₹450/650, with AC from ₹750/950; 🏠🏠) is the best digs in town, offering modern rooms with plasma TVs, exceptionally friendly service and – brace yourself – free wi-fi. Chicken *tikka butter masala* at the dimly lit Indian-Chinese restaurant (mains ₹25 to ₹120) was the best hotel meal we had in Western Odisha.

The temple operates three budget hotels just outside its grounds. **Atithi Bhaban** (📍250610; atithibhaban@gmail.com; d ₹250, with AC ₹500; 🏠) is the older building, with a pure veg restaurant and simple rooms. **Atithi Nivas** (s ₹150) is singles only, but solo travellers are better off springing for a much nicer double at Atithi Bhaban. **Yatri Nivas** (📍9337622798; d ₹175) has distinctly basic crashpads.

The 18447/8 *Hirakhand Express* plies daily between Bhubaneswar and Koraput. There are regular buses to Jeypore (₹12 to

Sixty-two tribal (Adivasi) groups live in an area that encompasses Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. In Odisha they account for one-quarter of the state's population and mostly inhabit the jungles and hilly regions of the centre and southwest. Their distinctive cultures are expressed in music, dance and arts.

Most Adivasis were originally animists but over the last 30 years have been targeted (with varying degrees of success and cultural sensitivity) by Christian missionaries, Hindu activists and government development agencies. Naxalites (members of an ultra-leftist political movement) have used Adivasis as foot soldiers while claiming to defend them.

Visits are possible to some villages and *haats* (village markets) that Adivasis attend. There are arguments regarding the morality of visiting Adivasi areas. At the *haats* you are free to interact with and buy directly from the villagers but tourism still brings very little income to the tribes.

Of the more populous tribes, the **Kondh** number about one million and are based around Koraput in the southwest, Rayagada and the Kandhamel District in the central west. The 500,000-plus **Santal** live around Baripada and Khiching in the far north. The 300,000 **Saura** live near Gunupur near the border with Andhra Pradesh. The **Bonda**, known as the 'Naked People' for wearing minimal clothing but incredibly colourful and intricate accessories, have a population of about 5000 and live in the hills near Koraput.

Important reasons to visit these areas on an organised tour:

- » Some tribal areas are hard to find and not accessible by public transport.
- » Adivasis often speak little Hindi or Odia, and usually no English.
- » Various cultural issues could affect your visit: the Dongria Kondh don't welcome strangers due to sensitive mining issues; alcohol sometimes makes the Bonda violent.
- » Some tour operators have developed longstanding relationships with the tribes, providing a level of interaction, experience and welcome not otherwise possible.

Some operators are more sensitive to the issues than others; ask about the size of your group and attitudes to photography, and try to get a feel for how interactions will be handled. Communal violence can flare up; tourists haven't been targeted but a good operator should be honest about and avoid areas experiencing trouble. Try to meet the guide who will travel with you, not just the boss in the office. See p595 and p590 for recommended agencies.

₹15, 45 minutes) and less frequent service to Sambalpur (₹280, 14 hours) and Bhubaneswar (non-AC/AC ₹330/440, 12 hours).

Onkadelli

This small village, 65km from Jeypore, has a most remarkable and vibrant Thursday **market** (best time 10am to 1pm) that throngs with Bonda, Gadaba, Mali and Didai villagers. In the morning, it's all business on the vegetable side; in the afternoon, the alcohol market revs up, and entire families get sloshed – *including* infants.

The market is popular with tour groups. Discreet photographs can be taken without issue, but if you're blatant or expect someone to pose for you, consent should be sought

and will often come with a request for ₹10 or more; carry small-denomination notes and stick to the women – men have been known to throw stones at photographers. Souvenir shopping is pretty much limited to jewellery sold by Bonda women.

Onkadelli is best accessed by hire car and should only be visited with a professional guide. You'll get much more out of the experience with a guide, who will usually be able to take you to visit craftspeople, not to mention keep the peace if things get ugly among the alcohol and the bows and arrows. This doesn't mean you have to come all the way from Bhubaneswar or Puri with a group or guide – it's feasible to come to Jeypore or Koraput independently and organise a guide at your hotel.

CHANDORI SAI

Some 50km northeast of Koraput in the tiny Adivasis village of Goudaguda, you'll find this Australian-run **guesthouse** (☎9443342241; www.chandoorisai.com; s/d incl meals 4000/5000; @), Odisha's most stylish rural accommodation bar none. Built from the ground up by the hands of some 60 Poraja tribal men and women, it's a sustainable earthen-walled refuge with beautiful terracotta flooring and bamboo-sheeted ceilings. The main lobby is dressed up with colourful hanging saris and the pottery, a speciality of the village, is present throughout. Guests interact with tribal women, who act as cultural ambassadors on property and guides through the village. It's about as close as you can get to a brief assimilation into the vibrant Adivasis way of life. The owner is a hard-driving ex-oil man, who runs the hospitality on a tight leash.

To reach Chandori Sai, catch the 18447 *Hirakhand Express* towards Koraput and get off at Kakirigumma, a 7.37am arrival. The guesthouse will pick you up from there.

Sambalpur

☎0663 / POP 154,170

Sambalpur is the centre for the textile industry spread over western Odisha, and Gole Bazaar is the place to buy *ikat* or *sambalpu-ri* weaving. The town is a base for nearby Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary on the edge of Hirakud Dam. NH6 passes through Sambalpur to become VSS Marg. Laxmi Talkies Rd crosses VSS Marg and leads down to the government bus stand and Gole Bazaar.

Odisha Tourism (☎2411118; Panthanivas Sambalpur, Brooks Hill; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Sat, closed 2nd Sat of month) can provide information on Debrigarh.

The lobby of all-AC **Hotel Uphar Palace Hotel** (☎2400519; VSS Marg; s ₹995-1095, d ₹1095-1195; 🍷) needs dusting, but rooms are in pretty good shape and are good value compared to Sheela. The Sharda restaurant has an Indian and Chinese menu (mains ₹20 to ₹215). The nicest – though not by much – is **Sheela Towers** (☎2403111; www.sheelatowers.com; VSS Marg; s/d from ₹995/1095; 🍷@☎), with a range of comfortable rooms. The modern art deco restaurant (mains ₹50 to ₹185) does Indian, Chinese and Continental. The **New Hong Kong Restaurant** (VSS Marg; mains ₹45-220; ☎lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) draws in crowds from far and wide, anxious to get down some authentic Chinese cuisine in a sea of curry. The Chen family has been at it for two decades.

The government bus stand has buses running to Jeypore (₹260, 12 hours), Koraput (₹275, 13 hours) and Berhampur (₹162, 12 hours). Travel agencies on Modipada Rd between the government bus station and Laxmi Talkies Rd book (usually more comfortable) buses that leave from the private Ainthapali bus stand, 3km from the city centre (₹20 by

cycle-rickshaw) during the day (night buses leave from in front of the agency counters). Several buses go to Bhubaneswar (₹205 to ₹260), Raipur (₹180, eight hours) and Jashipur for Similipal (₹190, seven hours).

The 18451 *Tapaswini Express* goes to Puri (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹176/463/632, nine hours, 10.40pm) via Bhubaneswar (₹158/413/563, seven hours). The 18006 *Koraput-Howrah Express* goes to Howrah (₹239/643/881, 10 hours, 6.15pm).

Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary

The 347-sq-km **Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary** (www.debrigarh.org; per day Indian/foreigner ₹20/1000; ☎6am-6pm 15 Nov-15 Jun), 40km from Sambalpur, is an easy day out. Mainly dry deciduous forest blankets the Barapahad Hills down to the shores of the vast Hirakud reservoir, a home for migratory birds in winter. Wildlife here includes deer, antelope, sloth bears, langur monkeys and the ever-elusive tigers and leopards.

Access to the sanctuary usually requires a 4WD, which can be arranged through Odisha Tourism, a private tour agency, or your hotel in Sambalpur for about ₹1700 for a full day.

NORTHEASTERN ODISHA

Similipal National Park

☎06792

The 2750-sq-km **Similipal National Park** (www.similipal.org; per day Indian/foreigner ₹40/1000, camera per 3 days ₹50/100; ☎6am-noon day visitor, to 2pm 15 Nov-15 Jun with accom-

modation reservation) is Odisha's prime wildlife sanctuary.

The scenery is remarkable: a massif of prominent hills creased by valleys and gorges, made dramatic by plunging waterfalls, including the spectacular 400m-high **Barheipani Waterfall** and the 150m-high **Joranda Waterfall**. The jungle is an atmospheric mix of dense sal forest and rolling open savannah. The core area is only 850 sq km and much of the southern part is closed to visitors.

There's a huge range of reptile, bird and mammal species. The tigers aren't tracked and sightings are extremely rare – the best chance to spot them will be at the **Joranda salt lick**. What you're more likely to see is a wild elephant (there are over 400 in the park), most probably at the **Chahala salt lick**. The best time to visit is early in the season before high visitor numbers affect animal behaviour.

There are two entrances, **Tulsibani**, 15km from Jashipur, on the northwestern side, and **Pithabata**, near Lulung, 25km west of Baripada. Options are a day visit or an overnight stay within the park. Overnight accommodation needs to be booked 30 days in advance, and remember you'll have to pay the ₹1000 entry fee for both days you're here.

Entry permits can be obtained in advance from the **assistant conservator of forests** (☎06797-232474; National Park, Jashipur, Mayurbhanj District), or the **field director, Similipal Tiger Reserve Project** (☎06792-252593; Bhanjpur, Baripada, Mayurbhanj District).

Visitors either come on an organised tour or charter a vehicle in Jashipur (₹1500 per day for 4WD) or Baripada (₹2500); the latter is pricier but you will see more of the park. Hiring a guide (around ₹500 in Jashipur, ₹800 in Baripada) is advisable.

If you want to avoid the hassles of arranging permits, transport, food and accommodation, an organised tour from Bhubaneswar, Puri or Baripada is the answer.

Forest Department bungalows (d Indian/foreigner from ₹600/800) has six sets of bungalows; Chahala, Joranda and Newana are best for animal spottings and Barheipani for views. The very basic accommodation has to be booked well in advance with the field director at Baripada. You have to bring your own food (no meat or alcohol allowed) and water.

In March 2009 Maoist rebels (or the timber mafia, depending on who you believe)

blew up three forest offices inside the park and raided the Chahala bungalow, robbing tourists who were staying there. The park was closed as a result and reopened for the 2011 season for day trips only. Check with tour operators or the field director for the most current information.

Jashipur

☎06797

This is an entry point for Similipal and a place to collect an entry permit and organise a guide and transport. Accommodation is very limited. **Sairam Holiday Home** (☎232827; NH6; s from ₹80, d from ₹250, with AC from ₹550; ☹) has basic rooms with mattresses like slabs of granite save the deluxe rooms (₹650). The owner can help arrange transport to Similipal.

Regular buses serve Sambalpur (₹150 to ₹200, seven hours), Bhubaneswar (₹150 to ₹170, nine hours), Baripada (₹55 to ₹70, 2½ hours), Balisore (₹65 to ₹85, 3½ hours) – for train connections – and Kolkata (₹140 to ₹180, seven hours).

Baripada

☎06792 / POP 95,000

The ramshackle transit hub of Baripada is the best place to organise a Similipal visit; if you're planning an independent trip, see **Odisha Tourism** (☎252710; Baghra Rd; ☺10am-5pm Mon-Sat, closed 2nd Sat in month). Recommended agency **Mayur Tours & Travels** (☎253567; mayurtour@rediffmail.com; Lal Bazaar) can also organise tours and has capable guides.

The best of the scant sleeping options, the clean-but-fading **Hotel Ambika** (☎252557; hotel_ambika@yahoo.com; s/d from ₹300/350, with AC ₹1000; ☹) has a great restaurant, local workers' bar and large rooms. The hotel can organise Similipal trips, language barrier notwithstanding.

Regular buses go to Kolkata (₹150, five hours), Bhubaneswar (₹170 to ₹207, five hours), Balasore (₹30 to ₹40, 1½ hours) and Jashipur (₹50 to ₹55, 2½ hours). The 2892 **Bhubaneswar-Baripada Express** (2nd-class/AC chair ₹92/339, five hours, 5pm) runs from Bhubaneswar every day except Saturday, and returns as the 2891 at 5am every day except Sunday.

Balasure

POP 106,000

Balasure, the first major town in northern Odisha geographically, was once an important trading centre. Now it's a staging post for Chandipur, Similipal National Park and the main rail line.

The office of **Odisha Tourism** (☎262048; ☉10am-5pm Mon-Sat) is located in Panthanivas Balasure but skip the hotel. Best option here is the new and eager **Hotel Chandrabhaga** (☎261808; Nuasahi; s/d from ₹350/450, with AC from ₹800/900; 🌞), 1km from the bus station, with spotless, fantastic-value rooms with large balconies. Don't spring for deluxe – the only difference is free water and tea. All rooms have king-size beds, which could be an issue for non-couples. Tolerable for a quick overnight is **Hotel Swarnachudaa** (☎262657; s/d/tr from ₹120/150/180, s/d with AC from ₹550/650; 🌞), just 100m from the bus stand; the AC rooms are worth the splurge.

From the bus stand at Remuna Golai, there is a 5am bus for Kolkata (₹160, 4½ hours) and more frequently for Bhubaneswar (₹130 to ₹160, five hours). For access to Similipal, there's a frequent service to Baripada (₹30, 1½ hours). The sporadic service to Chandipur makes an autorickshaw (₹200) a better option.

Balasure is on the main rail line. Options include the 12837 *Howrah-Puri Express* departing for Puri daily at 1.55am (sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹163/376/534/890, five hours). For Chennai, the 12841 *Howrah-Chennai Coromandel Express* calls at 6.05pm (sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹426/1143/1561/2637, 11½ hours).

Chandipur

☎06782

Throw down a few hostels, a couple of good bars and a moonlight DJ or two and this laid-back seaside village could be a very easy place to lose a few days. Unfortunately, Chandipur, which ambles down to the ocean through a short avenue of casuarina and palm trees, seems content as an underachiever. The draw here is a huge and beautiful beach: the sea recedes an astonishing 4km at low tide – a sight to see. It's safe to swim here when there's enough water.

Hotel Shubham (☎270025; www.hotelshubham.com; d from ₹550, with AC from ₹1000; 🌞) offers spotless and comfortable rooms (30% of

which are new or just renovated), a pleasant garden and an average restaurant. **Panthanivas Chandipur** (☎270051; dm ₹200, d from ₹750, with AC from ₹1150; 🌞🍷) has a great location overlooking the beach, but is otherwise not the best value in town. **Hotel Golden** (mains ₹30-150), on the main drag, does a limited selection of mainly veg Indian food, plus recommended local seafood; the excellent crab masala (₹150) is the house speciality, served whole.

Regular buses ply the NH5 between Bhubaneswar and Balasure. From Balasure, taxis and autorickshaws can take you the 15km to Chandipur.

Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary

Three rivers flow out to sea at Bhitarkanika forming a tidal maze of muddy creeks and mangroves. Most of this 672-sq-km delta forms Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary, a significant biodiversity hotspot.

The only way to get around the sanctuary is by boat. Many boats are a little battered, with old tyres on ropes acting as life preservers: this definitely adds piquancy to the thrill of boating on waters where enormous crocodiles can suddenly surface rather close by.

👁 Sights

TOP CHOICE **Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary**

NATURE RESERVE

(www.bhitarkanika.org; Indian/foreigner per day ₹20/1000, camera/video ₹25/500; ☹closed 15 May-31 Jul) The best time to visit is from December to February. Hundreds of massive estuarine crocodiles bask on mud flats waiting for the next meal to swim by. Bird-watchers will find eight species of brilliantly coloured kingfishers, plus 207 other species.

First stop is a permit check at Khola jetty before chugging on to **Dangmal Island**, where you'll find a successful crocodile breeding and conservation program (and accommodation). Pythons, water monitors, baboons, wild boar and numerous spotted deer can also be seen.

Hérons arrive at **Bagagahan Island** in early June and nest until early December, when they move on to Chilika Lake. Raucous open-billed storks have set up a permanent rookery here. The island is reached by a narrow pathway leading to a watchtower,

where you can spy on a mass of herons and storks nesting in the treetops.

Rigagada

HINDU TEMPLE

Back at Khola, a 2km walk leads to Rigagada with its interesting 18th-century **Jagannath temple**, built with some erotica in Kalinga style. While there, take an amble through this typical Odishan village.



Sleeping & Eating



Nature Camp

CAMPGROUND \$\$\$

(☎09437016054; www.bhitarkanikatour.com; dm/s/d/tr/qincmeals ₹1000/3000/3500/4000/5000) A special experience awaits at this small tented camp in the heart of Dangmal Village, built with the help of villagers and with a sustainable foot on the ground just steps from the sanctuary. The stylish Swiss Cottage tents are fully equipped with electricity, fans, sit-down flush toilets and pleasant terraces, and the restaurant serves wonderful rustic Odisha cuisine. Three-day/two-night packages (₹5000 to ₹7900 per person based on double occupancy) begin and end in Bhubaneswar and include full board, entrance fees, a boat trip, a nature trek and transport.

Forest rest houses

GUESTHOUSE \$

(r per person Indian ₹100-600, foreigner ₹200-1200) The distant second (and only other) choice at Dangmal has various options with solar lights, mosquito nets, no fans and lots of rules. You can book through the divisional forest officer in Rajnapur or through a travel agency in Bhubaneswar.

Aranya Nivas

HOTEL \$

(☎06786-220397; Chandbali; dm ₹200, r from ₹600, with AC from ₹1150; 🏠) Old, unremarkable rooms and new deluxe rooms (from ₹1500) that are more spacious with small touches like crown mouldings. Either way, mozzies abound. It's 50m from the Chandbali jetty.



Information

Permits, accommodation and boat transport can all be organised in the small port of Chandbali. Organise a boat (per day ₹2000, negotiable) with one of the private operators, such as the recommended **Sanjog Travels** (☎06786-220495, 9937702517; Chandbali Jetty), which can also help with obtaining the permit from the **divisional forest officer** (☎06729-272460, 9437037370; Rajnagar).

If you make arrangements in advance, you can shave one hour off the boat travel time by arranging to leave from the jetty in Jayanagar,

20km southeast of Chandbali. Take any bus from Bhubaneswar to Chandbali, get off in Kanika Chowk and take an autorickshaw (₹100) to Jaynagar. You can also take an autorickshaw from Chandbali (₹150). Contact Nature Camp (p609) or a travel agent in Bhubaneswar to arrange a boat.



Getting There & Away

Chandbali is 55km and two hours southeast of Bhadrak on NH5. Non-AC/AC buses go from Chandbali bazaar to Bhadrak (₹30/40), Bhubaneswar (₹80/130) and Cuttack (₹65/120); only non-AC goes to Kolkata (₹180). The 12821/2 *Howrah-Bhubaneswar Dhauli Express* stops in Bhadrak at 10.30am going south to Bhubaneswar (2nd class/AC chair ₹77/244, two hours); and at 3.30pm going north to Howrah (₹104/346, five hours).

Ratnagiri, Udayagiri & Lalitgiri

These Buddhist ruins are about 60km northeast of Cuttack. Currently there's no accommodation and inadequate transport, so the only feasible way to visit is by hire car organised in Bhubaneswar or Puri.

RATNAGIRI

Ratnagiri has the most interesting and extensive **ruins** (Indian/foreigner ₹5/100, video ₹25; 🌅dawn-dusk). Two large monasteries flourished here from the 6th to 12th centuries. Noteworthy are an exquisitely carved doorway and the remains of a 10m-high stupa. The excellent **museum** (🕒8am-5pm) contains beautiful sculptures from the three sites.

UDAYAGIRI

Another **monastery complex** is being excavated here in lush surrounds. There's a large pyramidal brick stupa with a seated Buddha and some beautiful doorjamb carvings. There's no entry fee, but unhelpful guides may attach themselves to you then ask for a donation (not compulsory).

LALITGIRI

Several **monastery ruins** (Indian/foreigner ₹5/100, video ₹25; 🌅dawn-dusk) are scattered up a hillside leading to a small museum and a hillock crowned with a shallow stupa. During excavations of the stupa in the 1970s, a casket containing gold and silver relics was found. It's also notable for its surrounding village atmosphere.

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